Knowledge management assessment trends

By Linda McGurn

Knowledge flow is essential in an operational environment where we must learn faster, understand better, and adapt more rapidly. The baseline flow requires an integrated knowledge environment where information moves freely between people, between systems, and between people and systems. Unfortunately, knowledge does not flow naturally in our complex environments; barriers come in all shapes and sizes. The knowledge assessment is a structured five-phase process (see Figure 1) that looks at all components of the knowledge environment — People, Processes, Technology, Content, Organizational Structure & Culture and Knowledge Leadership — and identifies barriers to knowledge flow.

Each knowledge assessment is performed by a team from Battle Command Knowledge System and involves a series of interviews with key leaders, mid-level managers, and employees in the organization. The Knowledge Assessment identifies:
• Knowledge and performance gaps
• The causes or factors contributing to the gaps
• The impact each gap has on the organization
• Measures of effectiveness and priorities for addressing the gaps
• Recommendations for strategies and approaches to close the gaps

An action plan with practical and operational solutions, along with a pilot and evaluation, usually follows the assessment. The knowledge assessment, like the mission analysis phase of the Military Decision Making Process, ensures we have identified the right problems and considered all the relevant facts, assumptions, and current available information before we begin looking at solutions. Each knowledge assessment engagement is unique and must be tailored to the needs of the organization.

To date BCKS has conducted knowledge assessments of more than 10 organizations ranging in size from ASCCs to directorates to individual staff functions. In these knowledge assessments, trends have emerged in knowledge activities, and knowledge gaps, and the factors contributing to the gaps.

Knowledge activities are the actions that the organization undertakes to manage knowledge. Within organizations assessed to date, knowledge activities fall into several major categories including: knowledge planning; knowledge creation, capture and transfer; and content management. The number of activities undertaken by organizations depended on its knowledge management maturity and the availability of resources.

Knowledge gaps occur when there are disconnects between what an organization knows and what it MUST know in order to accomplish its mission. While the knowledge activities may vary from organization to organization, the knowledge gaps observed have been very similar; we discuss those in greater detail below.

Contributing factors are those things in the operating environment that cause (or contribute to) the knowledge gaps. When we categorized the contributing factors across knowledge assessments conducted to date by the components of the knowledge environment, we found that the preponderance of factors related to process (See Figure 2). Contributing factors related to people and content were a distant second and third
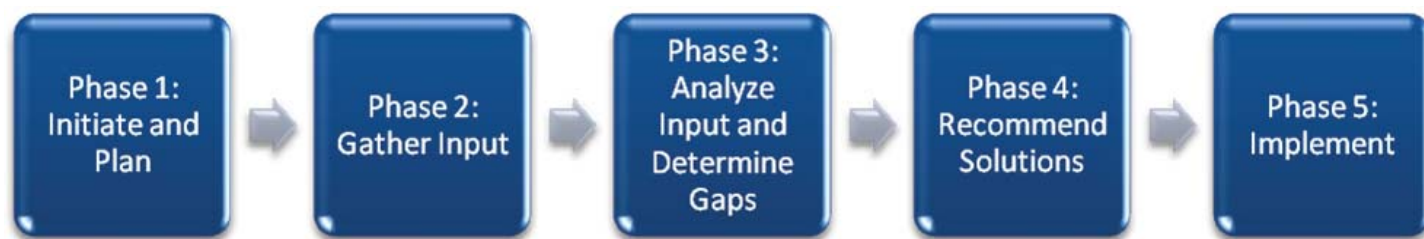
Figure 1: Knowledge Assessment Process

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Trends in Knowledge Gaps

Across the organizations that BCKS assessed, these emerged as the most prevalent knowledge gaps:

• Organizations don't have a common operating picture. Information regarding the organization's overarching mission is not centrally or readily available. Consequently, individuals or groups don't understand how they support the mission. Tools that could help establish a command "map," like a shared calendar and an organizational battle rhythm, are either underutilized or not implemented. What we observe: Organizations are using multiple calendars as opposed to a common, synchronized calendar to maintain visibility on what the Command and its leadership are doing. There is no SOP on what calendars to use, or how to use calendars effectively. Individuals are manually inputting information on multiple calendars rather than using built in software features to automate the process.

• People can't find information. Staff wastes valuable time looking for content or posting the same content in multiple places and formats. Out-of-date versions of key documents are used. Content management techniques are not known, understood or practiced. When information is found, for example on a portal, it often is not trusted because it may be dated. What we observe: Very few organizations have even basic content governance in place to guide how and where documents should be organized, stored and managed. Content management SOPs are insufficient or nonexistent. File structures and naming conventions are inconsistent. Many organizations are still using shared drives as central repositories.

• Information flow is inhibited by absence, misuse or misunderstanding of collaborative tools. Even where the technology is available to support blogging, wikis, libraries, team workspaces (just to cite a few examples), the tools are often seen as more of a hindrance than value-added. Consequently, an organization's ability to collaborate and maintain situational awareness is impacted. What we observe: Email is used as the primary tool for discussions, collaboration, and tasking even though more appropriate tools are available. Frequent use of "reply all" adds to user email overload and results in redundancy. There is no consistent understanding how to leverage tools, like SharePoint.

• Opportunities for face-to-face interactions and tacit knowledge exchange are missed
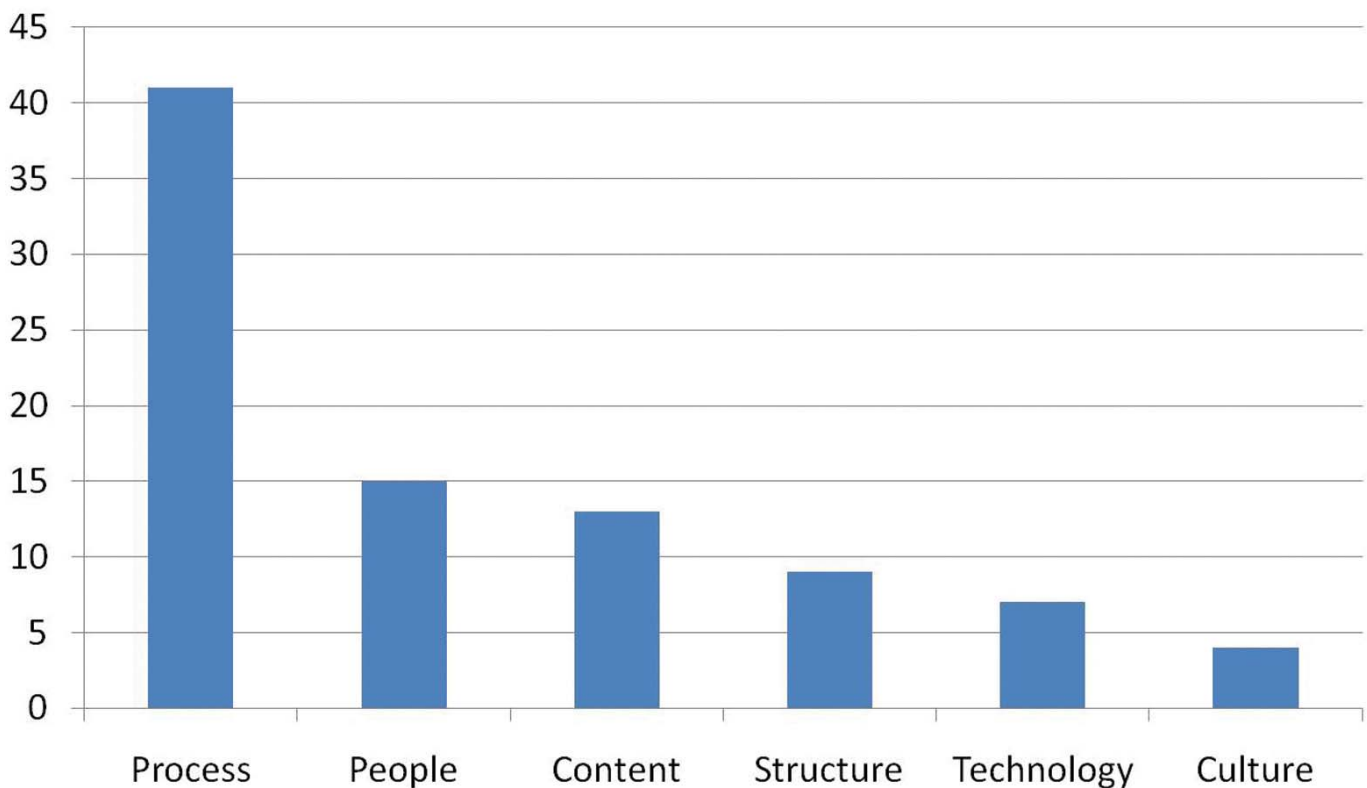

Figure 2: Contributing Factors Across the Knowledge Environment

or mismanaged. Because of high OPTEMPO, individuals will use email to convey complex messages that would be better communicated face-to-face. Where there is face-to-face interaction, knowledge sharing is not emphasized or facilitated. What we observe: Too many meetings, and the meetings that are held are not well-organized and do not include the right attendees. Meetings are scheduled at the last minute, disrupting schedules. The purpose of the meeting is not well understood and there is no apparent link between the outputs of one meeting and the inputs of another. Agendas are either incomplete or not adhered to, so meetings are ineffective and waste time.

• Knowledge is not effectively captured or transferred when there is personnel turnover. Organizational knowledge often resides in a handful of resources, and is lost when those resources depart. New hires are brought into an organization with few introductions and little training, then expected to perform optimally from day one. There are no formal programs to encourage and reward the sharing of tacit knowledge, within and between organizations. What we observe: an absence of processes and tools to identify expertise with an organization. New hires don't have access to a continuity book or a formal program to orient them to the organization.

The BCKS assessment team has helped organizations close these gaps by recommending practical and operational knowledge solutions. BCKS uses subject matter experts in areas such as process improvement, tacit knowledge transfer, content management and SharePoint to identify best practices. Depending on the needs of the organization, the recommendations can include a KM roadmap with prioritized tasks and measures of effectiveness.

To find out more about the knowledge assessment process, visit the Knowledge Assessment page on AKO: https://www.us.army.mil/suite/page/598135.

To request a BCKS knowledge assessment, please visit: https://survey.bcks.army.mil/secure/TakeSurvey.aspx?SurveyID=94LM4m2

For further discussion on this topic, visit KMNet, one of the BCKS Professional Forums. All BCKS Professional Forums require AKO access. Most BCKS forums require membership to view or participate in the forums. To join a forum, it's a simple 3-step process:
1. Access the BCKS Professional Forum page at: https://forums.bcks.army.mil.
2. Select the link to forum you want to join.
3. Then select "Become a Member," fill out the profile and submit.

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ACRONYM QuickScan

ASCC – Army Service Component Command
BCKS – Battle Command Knowledge System
OPTEMPO – Operations Tempo
SOP – Standard Operating Procedure